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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Written statement*/ submitted by Canadian Voice of Women for Peace,
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[13 January 2001]

*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Greetings to all the members of the Human Rights Commission.
Our organization has followed the events in Iraq since before the outbreak of war when one of our members joined an international team of women to work with the Iraqi Federation of Women on a peace plan that would have averted the war. We have made a number of trips back to assess the damage of the war and the effects of sanctions on the Iraqi population. Our last trip to Baghdad was in November, 2000, when we joined a group of 100 peace and human rights activists on an Olympic plane from Greece in protest to the sanctions.

There is no doubt that sanctions have inflicted much greater harm than the destruction caused by the 1991 war. The policy to impose sanctions has destroyed the human rights of a total population and, according to Denis Halliday, former coordinator of the UN Humanitarian Program in Iraq, satisfies the definition of genocide: a deliberate policy that has effectively killed well over a million individuals, children and women primarily.

It is difficult to know where to start in describing the situation. Although food and medicine are exempt from the sanctions, the limited income does not allow Iraq to make the necessary imports of food and medicine, resulting in thousands of deaths caused by illnesses, which, under normal circumstances, would have been treated. Maternal mortality rates have more than doubled during the period of sanctions and 70% of women suffer from anemia.

Most tragic is what has happened to the children. According to UNICEF and Red Cross statistics, 600,000 children under five years of age have died during this period, and as of today, 6,000 children are dying each month from starvation and illness û again due to lack of food and medicine.

There is a five-fold increase in cancer rates, and childhood leukemia is the highest in the world, the result according to many scientific experts of the approximately 800 tons of depleted uranium contained in ammunition used during the Gulf War.

To call the Iraq situation "suffering" is to put it mildly. What was once a progressive, emerging middle-class society, in one decade has become an impoverished and desperate citizenry. Immediately after the Gulf War, hard-pressed Iraqis began to seek new ways and means to simply feed their families. Children were pulled from schools to help sell on the streets. In order to raise money for survival, many began selling family heirlooms and prized furniture. The child's right to go to school and get an education has been abolished under the present conditions of life. As unemployment soared, the social fabric of the society began to break down, and a phenomenon hitherto unknown in Iraq "prostitution" became prevalent as women sought a source of income.

Those of us who live in other countries demand certain values for ourselves, and insist on upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We support human rights, transparency and accountability for other people because these are the values we demand for ourselves. We consider the international community is responsible for allowing such a flagrant violation of human rights to happen in Iraq. We hope to lay our case before the Human Rights Commission and make a case for strong action by this body.